DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 734 PS 030 355

TITLE	Strong Beginnings: Learning To Live.
INSTITUTION	Save the Children, Westport, CT.
PUB DATE	2000-12-00
NOTE	21p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Save the Children, 54 Wilton Road, Westport, CT 06880. Tel: 203-221-4130; Fax: 203-226-6709; Web site: http://www.savethechildren.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Education; Child Development; Community Development; Developing Nations; *Early Childhood Education; *Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; *Literacy Education; Models; Nongovernmental Organizations; Program Descriptions; *Young Children; *Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Save the Children Fund

ABSTRACT

The Strong Beginnings program, initiated by the Save the Children Fund in 1991, supports community-based activities in 20 countries aimed at reconstructing educational systems in developing countries. This report presents the vision of the Strong Beginnings program, describes its components, and describes the continuing challenge to improve access to quality basic education. The opening letter of the director of education at Save the Children emphasizes the contributions of Strong Beginnings to the goal of improving access to quality basic education. The report then delineates the current obstacles to basic education for children in developing nations and describes each of the four program components of Strong Beginnings: (1) early childhood development; (2) primary education; (3) youth development; and (4) adult literacy. Brief descriptions of these program components in various countries illustrate their design as community-based, child-centered, culturally appropriate, affordable, accessible, and sustainable. The village school model is described as Strong Beginnings' flagship approach to quality basic education in high poverty areas. Findings from these village schools illustrate their positive impact on student achievement. A map then details the location of Save the Children sites around the world. The report concludes with statistics highlighting the continued lack of quality basic education in areas of high poverty in developing nations and a request for monetary assistance for the Strong Beginnings program. (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

STRONG BEGINNINGS

ED 464 734

Learning to Live

PS 030355

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

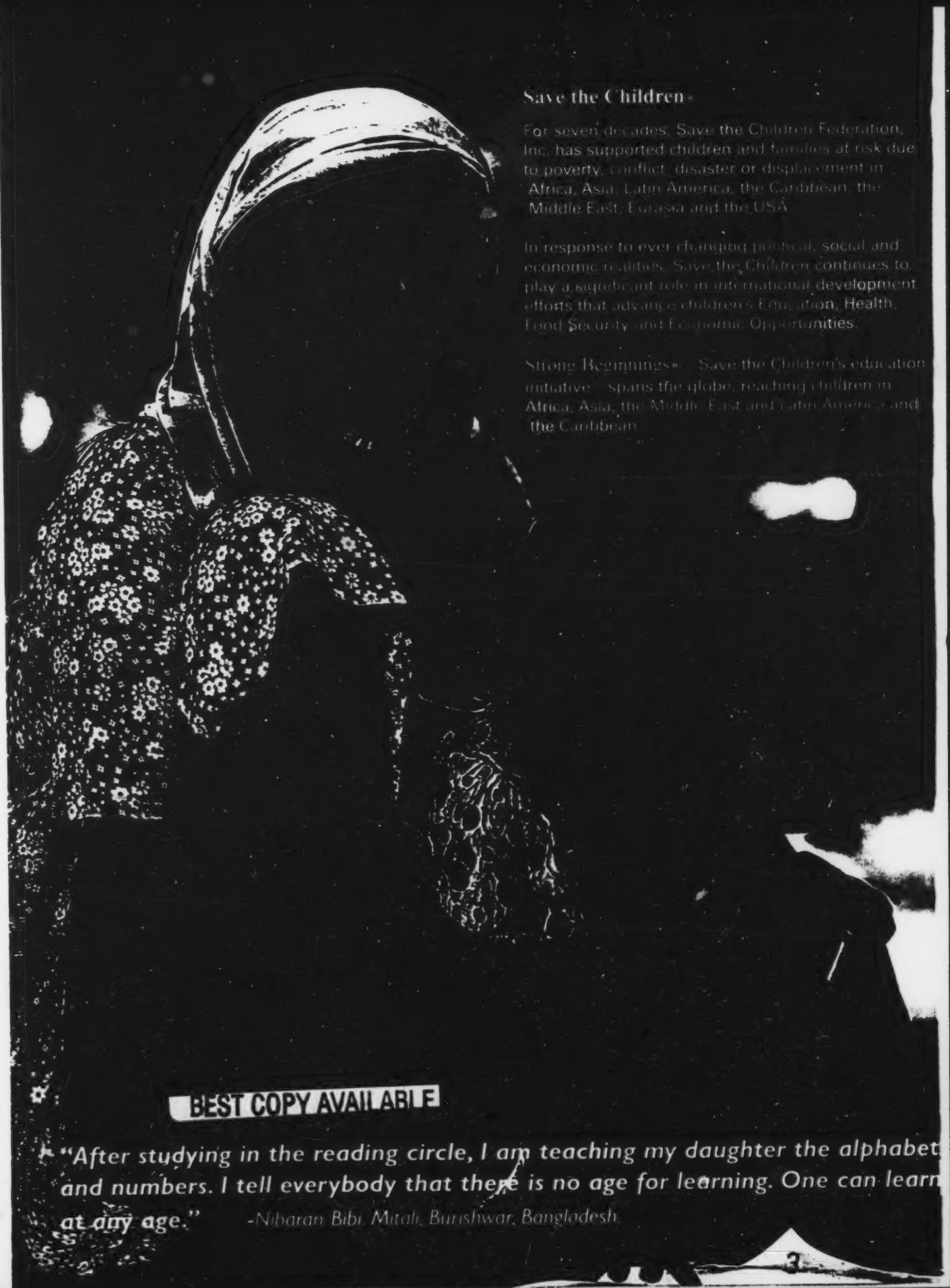
Amy Jo Dowd

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Save the Children


Save the Children
For seven decades, Save the Children Federation, Inc. has supported children and families at risk due to poverty, conflict, disaster or displacement in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Eurasia and the USA.
In response to ever changing political, social and economic realities, Save the Children continues to play a significant role in international development efforts that advance children's Education, Health, Food Security and Economic Opportunities.
Strong Beginnings™ - Save the Children's education initiative - spans the globe, reaching children in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean.
BEST COPY AVAILABLE
"After studying in the reading circle, I am teaching my daughter the alphabet and numbers. I tell everybody that there is no age for learning. One can learn at any age." -Nibaran Bibi, Mitali, Burishwar, Bangladesh.

STRONG BEGINNINGS: THE NEXT TEN YEARS

h greer

Save the Children's **Strong Beginnings** program was initiated in 1991. It started as an idea: a major international non-governmental organization (NGO) should have something distinctive to contribute to the quest for Education for All. Today, it is an international program with roots in more than twenty countries, demonstrating techniques, training methods, and a distinct profile of its own in international education. From the start, Strong Beginnings has espoused the notion that where there is a need for improved education in developing countries, what is essential are reconceived and rebuilt systems, as well as community participation and commitment.

In its initial ten years, Strong Beginnings has supported community-based activities aimed at that reconstruction. It has shown that, with remarkably little capital investment, local communities can organize to expand their children's access to school and indeed deliver their own basic education services to an acceptable degree of quality. This approach cuts the traditional cost of basic education, in some cases by a factor of ten. It allows curriculum to address the questions that are important to local people and that deal with "real life" issues. It shows that people's natural priority in caring for their children can be channeled into working for access to school. Also it shows that this new-found motivation can transfer to other aspects of their lives - child health, economic production, preserving the environment. Above all, at a time when the world has proclaimed the need for more attention to girls' education, Strong Beginnings' insistence on a 50/50 ratio between boys and girls demonstrates what can be done through the power of mobilized communities.

The Dakar Conference in 2000 readjusted the target of the international movement for Education for All (EFA), setting a new goal of 2015 for the attainment of quality basic education and advocating that new resources be invested in this effort. Strong Beginnings will of course contribute to this effort over the next ten years and beyond. It will also focus on the World Bank's public suggestion that more than thirty target countries are likely to fail to achieve EFA by 2015. It is in these countries where new thinking is required about structures, participation, and responsibility emanating from the grassroots level to influence national systemic change.

This is the vision of Strong Beginnings.

Fred Wood, PhD
Director of Education
Save the Children

CONTENTS

The Next Ten Years	1
Why Basic Education?	2
How We Work	3
Early Childhood Development	4
Primary Education	6
The Village School Model	8
Youth Development	10
Adult Literacy	12
Where We Work	14
The Challenge Continues	16
How Can You Help?	17

WHY BASIC EDUCATION?

Education fundamentally influences who we are, what we know, how we think, and what we can do. It determines the prospects of individuals and nations. It is the basis on which all other elements of development are founded.

THE OBSTACLES

Approximately 125 million children around the world have no access to school. Some 97 percent of these children live in less developed regions. Approximately 70 percent of these children are girls. Almost half of the adults in children's lives cannot read or write. There is compelling evidence that a child's well being is strongly associated with the mother's level of education. Nonetheless, throughout the 1990s, enrollment in primary schools was declining in 23 of 42 African nations. In 15 of these, enrollment was below 15 percent. Lack of education has many causes, many of them systemic and enduring. The main obstacles to a child's education are:

- Lack of Funding and School Resources
- Limited Access to Schools
- Low Parental Motivation
- Lack of Education for Women
- Poor Quality of Teaching

FACING THE CHALLENGES

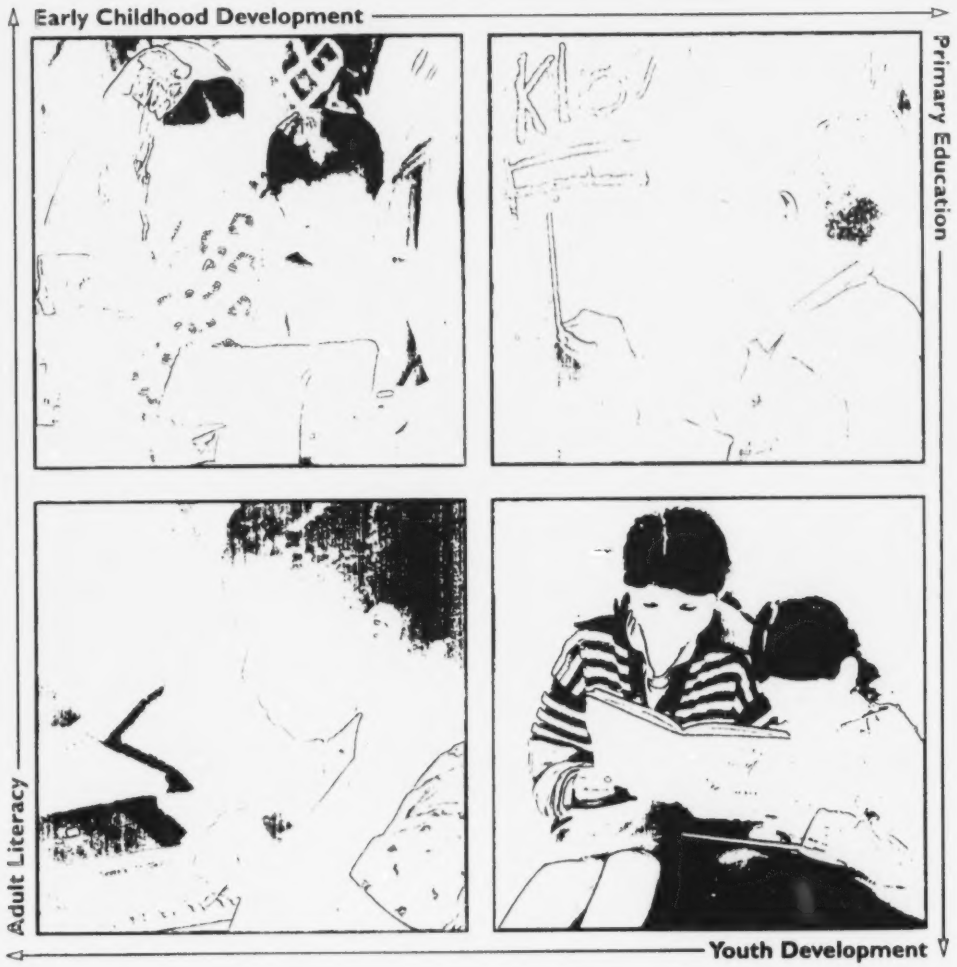
Building community support for children is one of Strong Beginnings' most powerful anti-poverty tools. It has demonstrated the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child." As a strategy that provides age-appropriate, stimulating educational activities for all members of a community, regardless of age or gender, the Strong Beginnings' community-based approaches start early and last a lifetime. The programs benefit the children, the adults, and the communities who support them.

In the West African nation of Mali alone, almost 800 Village Schools are serving more than 50,000 children in communities that had no previous access to schools. The Village School model has spread across the African continent to Guinea, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Somaliland, Uganda, Malawi, and Mozambique. Aspects of the programs have been adopted in Bolivia, El Salvador, Haiti, and Nepal.

HOW WE WORK

The founding premise of Strong Beginnings is that learning begins at birth and continues throughout life. With this in mind, Strong Beginnings has focused and developed multi-level, community-based programs in Early Childhood Development, Primary Education, Youth Development, and Adult Literacy.

THE STRONG BEGINNINGS CYCLE



Strong Beginnings currently works in more than 20 countries and has served at least 1,000,000 children and adults over the past decade. All Strong Beginnings programs are designed to be community-based, child-centered, culturally appropriate, affordable, accessible, impactful, and sustainable.

ages clockwise from top-left: M. Bisceglie, h greer, M Bisceglie, Rebecca James

M. Bisce

The first years of life are vital to a child's healthy development. With the right start, a child has a better chance of overcoming obstacles and of leading a positive and productive life. Strong Beginnings works hand in hand with families and caregivers, especially mothers, in the community to create a stimulating and nurturing environment in which their children can grow, learn and flourish.

Strong Beginnings helps communities develop materials to assist trainers and caregivers in providing more relevant and stimulating activities. Once developed, this approach can be adapted to meet the specific needs of different communities throughout the world, making the programs accessible to the greatest number of individuals. Child care can be based in both homes and community centers. When a new building is deemed necessary, the community contributes supplies and labor to the process, demonstrating the importance of community participation in the project.

"Eight years old is too late to start paying attention to children's learning needs." - *1996 Education For All Mid-Decade Review*

"Mankind owes to the children the best it has to give."
United Nations Declaration

Parents and community members participate in the training of the child care centers' management so that the program can be sustained beyond the direct intervention of Strong Beginnings.

Strong Beginnings Early Childhood Development programs are holistic in nature, incorporating messages of health, hygiene, and nutrition into trainings for parents and child care providers. Often the groups formed to manage and maintain the child-care centers participate in other Save the Children programming, including Women's Microfinance Projects and Adult Literacy Classes. The cross sectoral approach allows messages and skills to be applied to a wide variety of daily activities and opportunities.

HOOD DEVELOPMENT

R. James

In **El Salvador,** nonviolence and gender equity are incorporated into all Early Childhood Development (ECD) activities. Volunteer educators and ECD workers (animadores) rewrite fairy tales in ways that encourage positive role models and remove the violence. This serves both to draw attention to the fact that violence exists in everyday life where it often goes unnoticed and encourages creative thinking. The Community Life Skills Centers are safe places for children to learn and grow.

Judge Bentley Kassal

The **Vietnam** ECD program began as a pilot day care program in three lowland communes, covering 383 children in total. Basic facilities are provided at the local level, as are teachers' salaries. The Ministry of Education supports principals who serve in a mentoring role with junior teachers. The program aims to increase both public and private access, to improve the quality of ECD services, and to strengthen the community.

Beyond the Basics

h gr

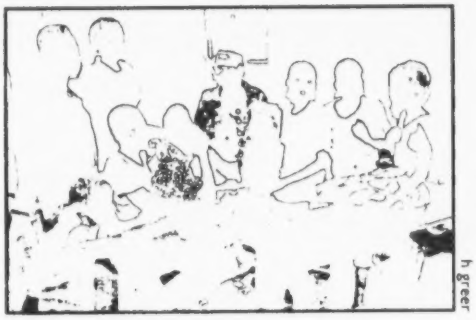
Save the Children's Village Schools are designed to meet the formal and nonformal education needs of students through curriculum, language, and materials that are familiar to them in their environment. Ownership and direction come from the communities where the children live. Village Schools have been shown to attract school-aged students, especially girls. Community schools demonstrate a variety of innovations based on partnerships among local community leaders, parents, non-profit organizations, educators and governments. School management is local, rooted in community mobilization and supported by trained paraprofessional teachers, drawn from villages and trained on the job. It interweaves education, health and economic opportunity activities to address effectively the larger, multi-faceted issues faced by communities.

"I never knew I was doing so much to help my daughter grow up strong and clever. Now I know I can really help her have chances I never had." - *Mother from the Philippines*

"An uneducated girl is a girl in darkness."
Salimata Kone

Village Schools are initiated in areas where there are limited access to or no schools. They also provide focal points for non-formal youth and community activities, reaching across health and literacy. They enable new institutions to develop through local efforts, sowing the seeds of democratic governance. Community ownership and management support teachers in focusing on the quality of education and bridge the gap between school and community. These schools are low in cost because of the involvement of parents, young people and community members. School infrastructure and curriculum vary by country and culture, adjusting to local needs. The curriculum (the "three Rs" plus life skills, including reproductive health, hygiene and nutrition) is based on local material and local languages that reflect the learners' lives. The Village School approach has been recognized for its easy replicability, cost-effectiveness, and dramatic improvements in the education of children.

EDUCATION



h greer

Almost 800 **Village Schools** have been formed since 1992 in Mali. Parents carry out school construction, making village schools an effective, low-cost model. Some 50,000 children, 47 percent of whom are girls, now have access to education. To increase girls' attendance, Save the Children programs have scheduled the school day around their daily chores, and school management committees have agreed to strive for a 50-50 ratio of boys to girls in each of their classroom.

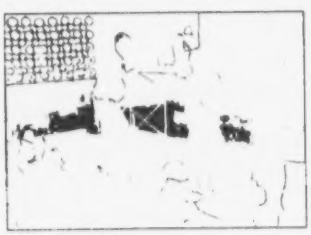
Stephen Shames

In central **Uganda**, in the District of Nakasongola, Child-centered Alternatives for Non-formal, Community-based Education (CHANCE) is a variant of the Village School approach to quality primary education for disadvantaged children. These include children in fishing and nomadic communities left out of the educational mainstream. Shorter school days, flexible curricula and innovative teaching methods have helped children outperform their peers in the formal system.

Strong Beginnings' Breakthrough: The Village School

The **Village School** is Strong Beginnings' flagship approach to quality basic education in high poverty areas and Save the Children's principal response to the challenge of Education for All. It offers children safe access to primary education in their own village. Parents, teachers and community are responsible for the construction, operation and, to a large extent, financing of their own schools. Curricula reflect village life. Class schedules respond to village demands. Teachers are locally recruited, bring innovative teaching methods to the classroom and use local languages. Parents agree that there will be an equal number of girls and boys in school. Women often play a leadership role on school management committees. Save the Children has a key role in teacher support and capacity-building for school management committees. The Village School program is now present in seven countries. Mali alone has almost 800 schools. Malawi, with a denser population, has over 360,000 pupils.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS



INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM

LOCAL BUILDING

TEACHER TRAINING

In the Nakasongola District, Uganda, villagers have come together to provide for approximately 2,500 students in 68 schools in the Strong Beginnings' CHANCE Project. Recent tests by the District Education Office have shown that CHANCE pupils outperform their peers in government schools. A Malawi study comparing schools within the Strong Beginnings' QUEST program to the government schools states that: "In every standard, pupils in the two districts of QUEST implementation outperformed their Salima (control group) colleagues in mathematics by over 13 percentage points. Academic performance has surpassed that of government schools in all subjects, in a three-hour day and in a shorter more flexible school year." In Mali, 50 percent of the first generation of Village School students passed the secondary education entry exam. 31 percent of the Village School students, 27 percent of whom are girls, passed the 6th grade exit exam and have moved on to government schools.

The Village School offers quality basic education with considerable cost savings. Nevertheless, its results in terms of pupil achievement are very creditable.

Mali - That hot afternoon, we came across a man on the road. He was actually pulling a small, ancient cart piled high with his crop of raw cotton. His young daughter, perhaps seven or eight, walked patiently beside him. "I'm going to sell my cotton at the market," he told us. "Is it far?" I asked. "Oh, about six or seven kilometers." About four miles, I thought to myself, and in that heat. "Your daughter comes with you?" "Yes, of course, she's very important." I asked him why his daughter was so important on his trip to the market. He told me how complicated the process of selling to the cotton agent was, the weighing and measuring, as well as the uncertainty of finding the agent in a fair mood. "And why does your daughter go with you?" "Why, she goes to the Village School." That caught my attention, the Village School is a Save the Children program, the very place I was here to visit. "And that's important to your cotton sale?" "Yes, certainly. My daughter can add. She can read. I bring her because when she is with me, the agent cannot cheat me as he could if I went alone." A little girl protecting her family from being cheated at the cotton scale is the true success of the Village School.

Ethiopia - After school, Hailu asked his child, "What did you learn in school today?" Little Worknesh responded, "We learned about the life cycle of a grasshopper," recalling the earlier environmental science class. At the next parents' council meeting, the discussion turned to what the children were learning. Worriedly, Hailu spoke up about the malaria killing off many children in their village. Given this, he asked, "I do not know too much about school, but wouldn't it be helpful to our children if, instead of the life cycle of the grasshopper, they learned about the life cycle of the mosquito. Then, they would know how and when to protect themselves." Other parents agreed, with other parents also wanting to know more. The curriculum was adapted to include this practical everyday example of the mosquito, which children shared with their siblings and families. As one of many schools begun through the Partnerships for Innovation for Education (PIE) project, local nongovernmental organizations demonstrate true partnerships with parents, community members and local school officials. To ensure their involvement in relevant education, the school takes into account the realities of everyday life so that what is taught in the classroom comes full circle back into the life of the child and community.

Reaching for Success

M. Bisce

Youth Development is the most recent area of Strong Beginnings action. School systems in many countries are incomplete or failing in their basic education purpose. The social unrest facing countries around the world illustrates that we can no longer risk ignoring millions of young people unreached by education.

Strong Beginnings focuses on key issues affecting out of school youth spurred by a growing concern that basic education systems do not equip young people with the skills and attitudes to lead a healthy, productive life. In some conservative societies, education does not offer an open door to individual development, especially for girls. Activities such as team sports for girls have given them the opportunity to gain leadership skills and to become female role models. In other settings, youth movements have not evolved as societies have evolved. The "modern" image of street-based youth groups,

"My mother wants me to be a doctor. My father wants me to be a teacher. But I want to study literature." - *Girl from Afghanistan*

that can develop into youth gangs, is more appealing than other positive, "traditional" or role model images. In addition, the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic disproportionately affects young people. Lack of information about the disease, unemployment, and accepted social norms increase their vulnerability to the disease. As HIV/AIDS spreads, especially in Africa and South Asia, young people must have the knowledge and practice behaviors to avert the threat of HIV/AIDS.

Refugee settings in Malawi and Zimbabwe during the Mozambique civil war allowed the development of the concept of "education with production", where young people learn and earn. Young "apprentices" returned to their original situation and were attached to established "masters." In Egypt, the issue of social restraints on girls is addressed through programs which promote both personal growth and skills development. El Salvador, a society plagued by street gangs, has attempted to address the issue of arbitration and conflict resolution. In Malawi, youth are directly involved in the development of Village AIDS Committees that have both a preventative purpose and a role in community-based care.

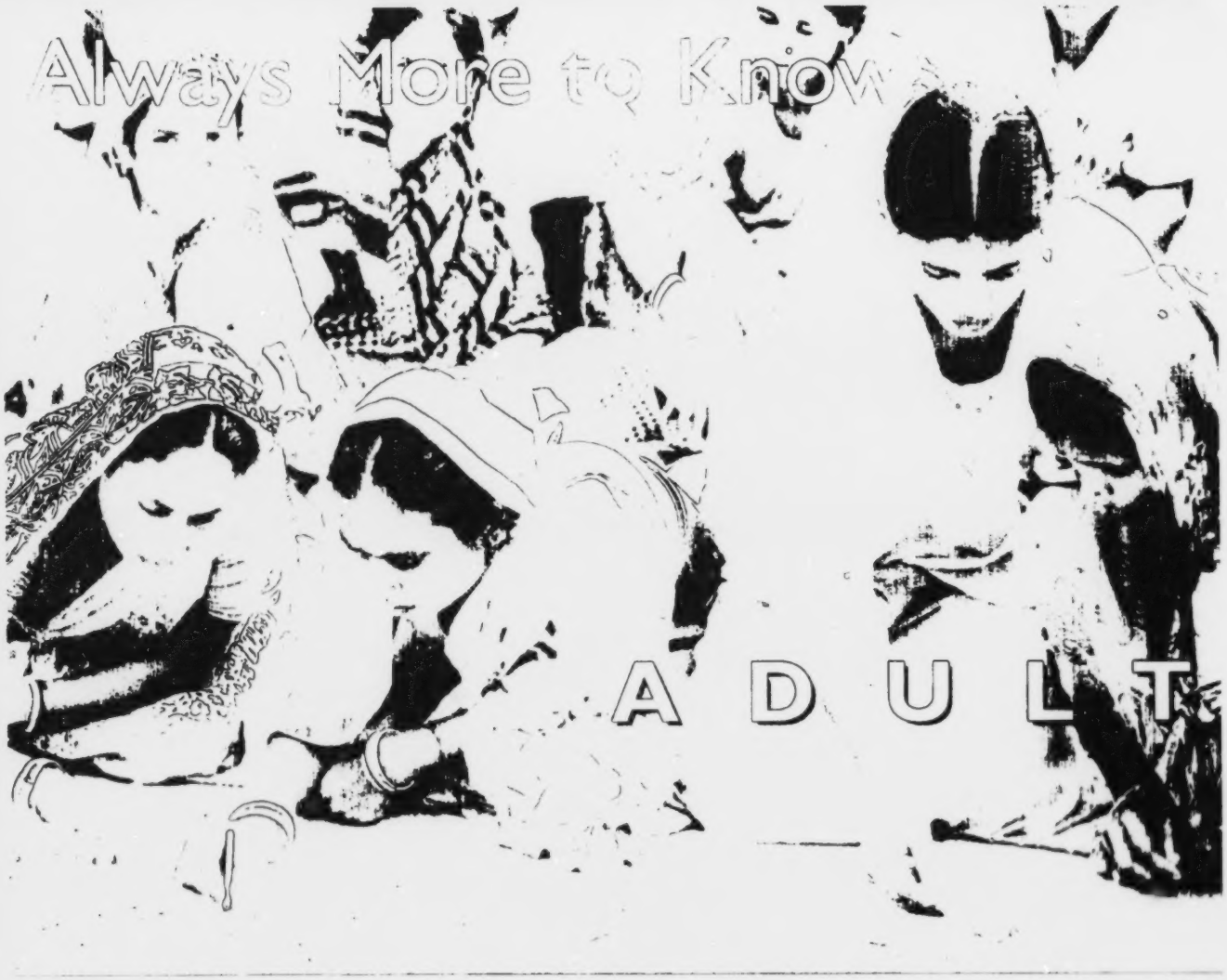
DEVELOPMENT

h greer

Community-based Options for Protection and Empowerment (COPE) mobilizes over 200 Village AIDS Committees in Malawi, providing services to orphans and their families. Youth design and conduct AIDS awareness activities including theatre and home visits. Some committees have developed home-based care kits for families. Communal tree nurseries and gardens provide income and food to families affected by AIDS.

M Bisceglie

Teenage girls have little opportunity for mobility, intellectual stimulation, or participation in community life. Save the Children developed its Ishraq project in Egypt, which uses a combination of literacy, numeracy and sports as a vehicle to enhance girls' opportunities to build self-esteem, and increase their skills. Team sports help girls learn about leadership, responsibility, and negotiation. Young women then establish themselves as role models.



M. Bisce

Illiteracy is a barrier to information, participation, and well being. People who can't read not only have fewer opportunities, but also their children suffer the burden of ignorance. When parents are trapped by their own lack of education, they are unable to provide a stimulating environment that sets the stage for the healthy social and emotional development of their children.

Given the direct relationship between parent education and child development, Strong Beginnings emphasizes women's literacy, an area neglected by many communities. Literate mothers use better child rearing practices and are more likely to value education and ensure that their children, especially daughters, attend school. Educating women is one of the wisest investments a society can make.

"I need education for life. Books are my life partner and I love them. Education is a valuable resource - it helps in changing our life."

- Mother from Bangladesh Reading for Children Literacy Program

"Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another."
Gilbert K. Chesterton

Strong Beginnings works to provide literacy and numeracy opportunities for adults and out-of-school youth. At community centers or at home, groups gather during times that are convenient to daily work schedules to learn skills that will benefit themselves and their children. The materials developed are culturally appropriate and convey relevant information on health, hygiene, nutrition, parenting, and economic opportunities. In this way, parents become literate while obtaining information crucial to improving the status of their families.

An intergenerational approach to literacy creates a foundation for personal growth, family strength and community development. What the parents know, they can teach, providing new opportunities for their children and community members.

LITERACY

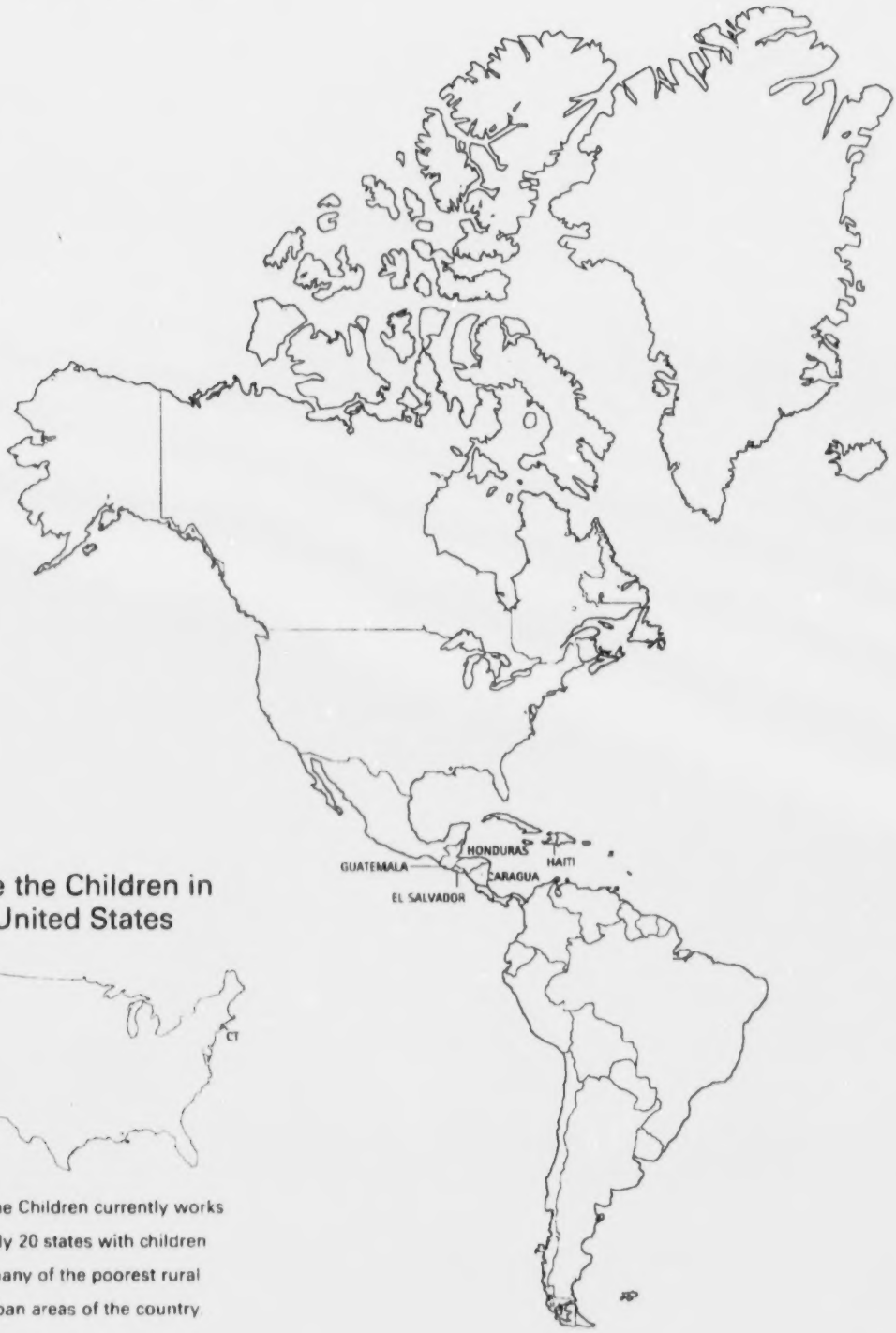
M Bisceglie

The Bangladesh "Reading for Children" program began with women's savings and micro-lending groups. After basic literacy was achieved within two years, the women moved away from the literacy circle. Their skills rapidly deteriorated. To encourage new literates to maintain reading skills, mothers formed reading groups to read to their children. From this, developed a series of children's books in Bengali, drawing on local talent and folk tales. Then, a mobile library "service" was created to reach surrounding communities.

R James

The COMAL Project targets the education of illiterate Mayan adults and youth. Over 60 percent of Guatemala's population is Mayan yet less than 40 percent are literate. Learning materials have been developed in I'xil, K'iché and Spanish. This approach to literacy combines social mobilization, women's empowerment and community development. COMAL now reaches 62,000 participants in 1,200 communities. Over 60 percent of those attending are women and children under 15.

Our Global Neighborhood



Save the Children in the United States

Save the Children currently works in nearly 20 states with children from many of the poorest rural and urban areas of the country.

17

Where We Work

Save the Children USA works in more than 40 countries, including the United States. We are part of the International Save the Children Alliance, a worldwide partnership of over 30 independent Save the Children organizations that work to ensure children's well-being and to protect their rights everywhere.

☐ SAVE THE CHILDREN USA

inal map set by O&I Design Inc. NYC

THE CHALLENGE CONTINUES

The lack of access to quality basic education, compounded by global crises in health, security and economic development, presents a continuing challenge.

Today:

- **Over 125 million children do not have access to basic education.**
- **Eight hundred and eighty million adults are illiterate, some 64 percent are women.**
- **Approximately 18.8 million people have died of AIDS - 3.8 million of them children - mostly in Africa.**
- **At least 540 million children are living in crisis situations.**
- **At least sixty-six million young people are unemployed and out of school.**
- **70 million girls around the world do not attend school.**
- **Today, 1.3 billion people live on less than $1 a day.**

As the twenty-first century begins and the social crises of our time become ever more acute, education - the preventive force - has an ever greater role to play.

M. Bisc

h greer

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Your contribution will make a lasting difference in today's world. The statistics prove how vast our challenge is. Thank you for helping Save the Children and Strong Beginnings provide for children and families in need. Thank you for helping us work with children and families in need. Please cut along the dotted line and make your gift payable to Save the Children/Strong Beginnings and send it to:

54 Wilton Road
Westport, CT 06880

Please accept my donation of $_____ motivation code: 71933

I enclose a check made payable to Save the Children/Strong Beginnings

Or

Please debit my credit card for $_____

Visa/Mastercard/American Express/Discover/ (Please circle one.)

Card Number: _____ Expiration Date: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

i greer

Save the Children
54 Wilton Road
Westport, CT 06880
(203) 221-4125

e-mail: fwood@savechildren.org
website: www.savethechildren.org

Save the Children is an international nonprofit child-assistance organization serving 9 million children and adults and working in more than 40 countries worldwide, including nearly 20 states in the U.S. Founded in 1932, our mission is to make lasting, positive changes in the lives of children in need. Save the Children also is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, which is the largest child development organization with a worldwide network of 30 independent Save the Children organizations working in more than 100 countries to ensure the well-being and protect the rights of children everywhere.

Information concerning Save the Children Federation, Inc., including financial, licensing or charitable purposes(s) may be obtained, without cost, by writing to Save the Children Federation, Inc., Assistant Corporate Secretary, 54 Wilton Road, Westport, Connecticut 06880, or by calling 1-800-728-3843. In addition, residents of the following states may obtain financial and/or licensing information from their states, as indicated. Registration with these states, or any other state, does not imply endorsement by the state. Florida: A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL FREE, 1-800-435-7352. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE. Maryland: For the cost of copies and postage, documentation and financial information submitted to the Secretary of State is available from the Secretary of State, State House, Annapolis, MD 21401. New Jersey: Information filed with the Attorney General concerning this charitable solicitation may be obtained from the State of New Jersey by calling 1-973-504-6215. Registration with the Attorney General does not imply endorsement. New York: A copy of the most recent annual report is available from the Office of the Attorney General, Department of Law, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, New York 10271. North Carolina: Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Branch at 1-919-807-2214. The license is not an endorsement by the State. Pennsylvania: The official registration and financial information of Save the Children Federation, Inc., may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement. Virginia: A copy of the financial statement is available from the Division of Consumer Affairs, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services, P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23209 or call 1-804-786-1343. Washington: Financial information available from the Secretary of State, Charities Division, Olympia, WA 98504, or call, in state, 1-800-332-4483. West Virginia: West Virginia residents may obtain a summary of the registration and financial documents from the Secretary of State, State Capital, Charleston, WV 25305. Registration does not imply endorsement. Contributions to Save the Children are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. (Rev. 12/00)